

**NARRATIVITY AND CREATIVITY IN NIGERIAN THEATRE: INTERROGATING THE APPLIED THEATRE AESTHETICS OF COMMUNICATION IN HAGHER'S *SWEM KARAGBE* AND OSOFISAN'S *MOROUNTODUN***

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**Abstract**

*This paper examines the functional intersections of narrativity and creativity as aesthetics of communication within the paradigm of Theatre in Nigeria. Using Iyorwuese Hagher's *Swem Karagbe* (1979) and Femi Osofisan's *Morountodun* (1982) as primary texts, the paper interrogates how these playwrights repurpose indigenous folkloric materials such as myths and legends through oral storytelling traditions to communicate contemporary socio-political challenges such as leadership failure, class struggle, and national consciousness. While *Swem Karagbe* harnesses a parable of the consequential trip to *Swem Karagbe*, the narrative deeply rooted in Tiv mythology to critique elite greed and corruption, *Morountodun* reinterprets the *Moremi* mythic legend through a Marxist perspective to highlight peasant resistance and ideological transformation. The study adopts qualitative research method through content analysis to find that the playwrights' deployment of typical "storytellers", "role-play" dramatic technique, "characters allegory" and "audience-performer" rapport transcends mere entertainment, and functions instead as a strategy for target conscientisation and social advocacy. These findings presuppose that narrativity and creativity in these plays serve as Theatrical aesthetics, which bridges the gap between traditional oral performance and modern interventionist theatre. The theoretical framework underpinning this paper is Sam Ukala's *Folkism*, which spotlights the bridging of gap between traditional African oral performance and the modern play-text, through an analytical parameter refers to as *Laws of Aesthetic Response*. The paper therefore concludes that the integration of folkloric aesthetics is vital for facilitating a theatre that is both culturally grounded and instrumentally relevant to Nigeria's developmental aspirations.*

**Keywords:** Narrativity, Creativity, Applied Theatre, Nigerian Drama, Folkloric Aesthetics, Communication.

## Introduction

African theatre in general and Nigerian theatre in particular has long served as a portent medium for cultural propagation and preservation, social commentary, political discourse amongst other interventions. Theatre in this regard is usually instrumental in accentuating the ideals of the society; both the apparent and the latent which constitute human experiences in relation to the environment. Notably, there are fundamental arts through which theatre finds expression in the society. These include playwriting (involving an order of speeches and performance nuances for the stage and perhaps screen), directing (involving the artistic visioner of the script and its nuances for production), acting (involving performers on stage before the audience), and designing (encompassing scenic, costumes and make-up as well as sound designs) amongst others. These fundamentals are usually harnessed artistically in coalescence with other elements to communicate preconceived messages to the people. According to Umokoro:

In modern times, the theatre has continued to grow in influence and significance, performing the traditional functions of information, entertainment, and education, in addition to its effective use for political propaganda and ideological persuasion. It has also been used to fight oppression and dictatorship, with remarkable impact, at different times in parts of Africa, notable in Nigeria (115).

This is indicative that theatre could effectively be deployed to facilitate target conscientisation, social advocacy, educational policy framework, therapeutic interventions amongst others. It is in this light that Osanyin submits that theatre “is the ultimate parliament of the people that is why theatre is reputed the world over to be a powerful weapon for social mobilisation and social change” (47). Therefore, the use of theatre for specific purposes of intervention and development through certified methods speaks to the notion of applied theatre. The onus is geared towards the use of theatre beyond the confines of traditional performances to facilitating social dialogue, cultural re-orientation and other forms of social commentary with a view to communicating developmental initiatives to the people. This unique role portends theatre as a pertinent tool that transcends traditional performances in space and time for a straitjacket audience to facilitating crucial issues of development in the society.

Evidently, many playwrights in Africa have tailored their dramaturgy to communicating pertinent issues, especially national issues using the instrumentality of oral tradition. In this regard, Idoko and Igomu assert that “the form, content and element of Nigerian drama can be said to be generally drawn from the oral tradition as well as the rich artistic and diverse cultural heritage of the people” (77). In other words, many playwrights in Africa, have demonstrated in their plays the need for societies to have in the words of Gunner, “memory banks that act as mirrors and as a form of working archive led in many instances to the extensive use of oral...to formalise memory of the past, and to make the past comprehensible and accessible” (69).

In this light, the pioneers of African theatre in English such as James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, Efua Sutherland, Ngugi waThiong’o, Wale Ogunyemi, Tawfiq al-Hakim,

Ebrahim Hussein, Zulu Sofola, Ama Ata Aidoo amongst others have in different manners explored folkloric materials inherent in their respective societies as aesthetic endeavours to birth plays that communicate issues of development to the people. Notable examples of African plays that tilt to the trajectory of harnessing folkloric aesthetics to communicate national issues to the people include Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forest* (1963) and *Kongi's Harvest* (1967); J.P. Clark's *The Masquerade* (1964) and *Song of a Goat* (1971); Tawfiq al-Hakim's *Fate of a Cockroach* (1966); Efua Sutherland's *Edufa* (1967) and *The Marriage of Anansewa* (1975); Ebrahim Hussein's *Kinjeketile* (1970); Ola Rotimi with *Kurunmi* (1971) and *The Gods are not to Blame* (1971); Wale Ogunyemi with *Ijaiye War* (1970) and *Kiriji* (1976), Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Miri with *I Will Marry when I Want* (1982) amongst many others.

The narrative and creative ingenuity that characterised Nigerian theatre permeates the generational and gender divides of the playwriting tradition in Nigeria. Notably, the use of African folktale narratives usually crystallised by the traditional "storyteller(s)" who facilitates dialogical and performative rapport with the audience is apparent in many Nigerian plays of the first, second and successive generations of playwrights in Nigeria. For instance, Iyowuese Hagher and Femi Osofisan whose dramaturgical crafts flourished in the second generation (though both proceeded from the first generation) have this tradition vividly embodied in their plays. Their dramaturgies are replete with ingenious dramatic and stylistic forms that juxtapose indigenous folklore and contemporary national issues.

The aim of this paper therefore is to examine how narrativity: the structured storytelling framework and creativity, the accentuation of ingenuous expressions and nuances function as applied theatre aesthetics of communication in the selected plays. The appropriation of the general overviews of these concepts with their functionality in the two plays evinces their pertinent role in applied theatre, which emphasises purposeful communication and social impact that transcend mere entertainment. Moreover, the paper adopts qualitative method of research through content analysis to examine the use of narrativity and creativity as well as how these phenomena approximate to applied theatre aesthetics of communication in the selected plays. The rationale for selecting the two texts, which represent the broad spectrum of Nigerian theatre, and equally portraying the first and second generations of Nigerian playwrights is not farfetched. It is propelled by the folkloric elements therein, which embody narrativity and creativity as aesthetic endeavours to communicate preconceived messages to the people.

### **Synopses of Hagher's *Swem Karagbe* and Osofisan's *Morountodun***

*Swem Karagbe* dramatises the adventurous trip to *Swem* land, the supposed ancestral land of the Tiv tribe by a group of self-acclaimed politicians in search of fortunes. They are led by a slave guide, Ankpan. The play opens with the dexterous narrator, an old man who is thronged by several young men and women at night in a typical Tiv story telling setting. He begins as customary with a catchy opening glee to whet the appetites of his audience. In the story, the king of *Awuna* in consultation with his council of chiefs proposes a trip to *Swem Karagbe* as a new criterion and prerequisite for choosing who the next governor of their community becomes. He who survives the rigours of visiting the land and successfully returning would become their next leader. Three politicians; Yatwen, Gbabo and Fuusu with Ankpan, as their slave guide agree to undertake the herculean trip to attract leadership fortunes.

The trip to Swem is characterised by unforeseen rigour, trials and distresses, having to face with temptations from spirit beings ranging from *Azov* and *Mbatore* including goddesses. With the guide of Ankpan, the politicians finally come face to face with the god at Swem, except for Fuusu who is enticed with *Nyumugh's* (a spirit) food and is consumed on the way. They are asked to tender their requests both positive and negative. Yatwen ask for success and wealth for himself but misery for the people, just as Gbabo who ask to be the governor and head of everything in his community while the people wallow in obscurity, poverty and superstition. The god at Swem asks Ankpan to also tender his request and he asks for ability to serve with courage, humility and patience while the people multiply in wealth and health.

Their return from *Swem* through an alternative route back to their community is smooth sailing until they encounter female contractors led by their Queen, Mammywata. The remaining two politicians could not withstand the trials from the Queen and her cohorts as they are enticed with alcohol and are eventually seduced by the female contractors, except for Ankpan, their slave guide who feigns illness at first and later fights and overpowers the two female contractors assigned by their Queen to destroy him. In the end, only Ankpan, the slave guide escapes to his community to tell the story. He is now crowned as the governor of Awunacomunity against expectations.

Osofisan projects in *Morountodun* a dual subject matter to advance the plot of the text. The peasant farmers revolt, which is known historically as Agbekoya Uprising on one hand and the myth of Moremi on another hand. With the use of flashbacks, he brought historical events into the present, coalescing them into the dramatic story. The stylistic approach of “play within a play”, is introduced at the beginning of the story where Titubi and her group enter to disrupt the theatre performance meant to show the audience the imperatives of events associated with the uprising as it is being dramatised. Titubi and her agents represent the rich who are unwilling to allow the people get oriented about their plight, hence the reason to disrupt the performance before the people become informed by it and get more resolute.

As the Deputy Superintendent of Police gets to the scene, Director who is the narrator of the story finds it hard to convince him that he is the one who called for his intervention; he is the one being disrupted and not the disrupter. After arguments ensue between Titubi and the Deputy Superintendent, and upon discovery that it is Titubi who comes to arrogantly stop the theatre performance, the Deputy Superintendent offers to arrest her instead. After much altercation with the Deputy Superintendent, she agrees with him on another way to stop the peasant revolt. To accomplish this, Titubi volunteers to serve as police informant to defeat the peasant and protect her class. She will disguise as a prisoner so that when the peasants, led by Marshal invade the prison house she will be rescued as one of the prisoners. The plan is for Titubi to find her way to the peasant militant's camp and infiltrate them and eventually defeat them. Titubi's mother, Alhaja Kabirat is disgusted with the plan and threatens to deal with the police whom she believes hatched the idea to demean her daughter. She is surprised and frustrated that she cannot at this stage convince her daughter to jettison the crazy idea and go home. Titubi now vows that as the great Moremi of Ile-Ife did it, she will do it as the Moremi of her time.

Titubi in the turn of events made her way to the peasants' camp in disguise as a prisoner. But she now undergoes radical transformation and can discover that the prisoners are fighting a just cause. Although she succeeds on her espionage mission, she instead facilitates negotiations to resolve the conflict between the two parties to the amazement of the Deputy Superintendent and her mother Alhaja Rabirat. She now through her transformative voyage becomes empathetic of the peasants and their plight. She concludes that, Moremi, her role model fought a just cause but in her own case she is a transformed Moremi who has been able to find out that the state is not always right, especially in the situation whereby exploited and poor peasants are made to pay taxes more than the rich through their noses.

### **The Notion of Narrativity**

Narrativity emphasises the efficacy and quality of storytelling patterns in texts or performances with focus on given narrative elements that convey meaning to the people. Omojola agrees that "narrativity denotes the inherent orientation of a...performance to self-define the premises of its efficacy and coherence based on the convention of practice to which it is affiliated and as gleaned by listeners (the audience). Such premises are both internal and external" (3). According to Shen, "a certain density or variety of narrative features in a text can guarantee that it will be received as a narrative" (3). This presupposes the functionality of narrativity in the "world" of play-text and other performative narratives, which are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors of the narratives.

In theatre, especially dramaturgical practice, narrativity transcends linear plots to include embodied elements like dialogue, gesture, and audience participation to transform passive reception into active interpretation. Narrativity in this regard connotes a narrative that conveys story of events, people and their socio-cultural environment. In this light Obi submits that, "storytelling is a device of narrative drama used to move the plot along through the actions in the play, revealing intrigues and other dramatic devices" (145). This dynamic allows narratives to reflect cultural worldviews, making theatre a site for communal reflection. Furthermore, narrativity in systems thinking, as applied to theatre, enables storytelling about complexity, practicing empathy by viewing the world from multiple perspectives. In African contexts, narrativity often draws from oral traditions, integrating ritual and communal participation to address societal issues.

In Hagher's *Swem Karagbe*, narrativity is reflected through the ancestral myth of "Swem Karagbe" narrative, rooted in Tiv folklore. The play's plot revolves around this phenomenon where a group of would-be leaders, journey to the Swem land, representing a pilgrimage to ancestral land of origin for moral renewal. This structure connotes a parable of representative leadership and purpose where events unfold chronologically to reveal symbolic crises and resolutions, through the mechanism of Tiv storytelling traditions that integrate the human and spiritual realms. The narrative shifts between characters revealing a mixed bag weaknesses, resilience, greed, and purpose in relation to leadership, thus communicating cultural values of accountability and heritage. The plot is advanced through Tiv storytelling narrative framework, characterised by an impressive opening glee that builds through crises, emotions and resolutions amidst songs, dances, mime and chants in affinity with the audience. The narrativity in this regard serves as a social commentary on the greed and corrupt tendencies of the elite, using the "Swem Karagbe" myth to critique the societal vices and at the same time preserve cultural education.

Osofisan's *Morountodun* remodels the Moremi legend to conform with the Agbekoya Uprising, using narrativity, thereby blending myth and history into a fusible tandem. Titubi, the protagonist's transformation from an elite-bred woman to a revolutionary empathizer with the masses is narrated through flashbacks and social dialogue, to emphasise ideological stimulation. This conscientious narrativity propels audience participation thereby turning the play into a medium for social commentary, advocacy and action that underscore national issues in the polity. The playwright reinvokesthe ancient mythic legend, Moremiwho offers herself to infiltrate the enemy camp, to end the war between the Igbos and the Ile-Ife people to create parity with Titubi's infiltration of the peasants' military camp. The playwright in this regard, accentuates a narrative that critiques oppression and leadership failure using myth and history to foreground class struggle and the role of women in nation building.

### **The Concept of Creativity**

Creativity in broad sense connotes thinking that is aimed at producing ideas or products that are relatively novel and that are, in some respect, compelling (Kaufman and Sternberg 6). In theatre, creativity involves the production of ingenious, striking and pertinent ideas through scripting, characterisation, design, and adaptation in performance, accentuating innate skills that elicit appeals to the people. This embodies interconnecting cognitive processes with physical expressions that are often drawn from cultural reservoirs of the people's traditions. Creativity as a human endeavour is found in every facet of human coexistence and interactions. However, as Carter, quoted by Jones opines, creativity "is not a capacity of special people but a special capacity of all people" (14).

In African contexts, creativity usually finds expression through the fusion of folklore:epics, legends, rituals, proverbs and contemporary critique, propelling theatre to address societal issues imaginatively. That is the kind of theatre Ademiju-Bepe conceptualises as African Storytelling Theatre. In his words, "The African storytelling theatre is a dramatic performance in which the performer is completely at liberty to create and interpret. The several devices incorporated represent the aesthetic principles of the tale telling and are tools for his creativity" (88). In theatrical performances for instance, the trajectory of creativity could be identified in the elements of scenario building, scripting, directing, acting or role-playing, and designing that culminates into performance for the consumption of the audience. This trajectory emphasises collaboration and innovation, which are integral parts of creativity. In this regard, creativity is seen as a catalyst for novel, excellent, and relevant ideas, usually through collective engagement that defines genius and appeals.

Hagher's creativity in *Swem Karagbe* is indicative in his satirical reimagination of Tiv ancestral myths: the consequential trip to "Swem" Land portraying it as a social commentary on the wanton greed and endemic corruption of the elite. Through the deployment of folkloric elements such as *Adzov* (cosmic spirits) and allegory of human characters that co-habit the cosmos. The playwright asserts this phenomenon as a parable of leadership and its attendant exigencies. He creates a hybrid form that critiques societal vices and at the same time accentuates cultural education. This creative ingenuity propels a dialogical approach that emphasises empathy, communal values and moral principles. The play blends storytelling with performance to highlight the principles of unity

and moral renewal as integral aspects of leadership. Hagher's creative use of "Swem" myth as subject matter of the play, paradox and mime in the narrative structure is indicative of creative adaptation of Tiv oral traditions for contemporary political satire.

In Osofisan's *Morountodun*, the creativity stems from the reinvention of the Moremimyth, juxtaposing the ancient legend of Ile-Ife as the heroine for the state and Titubi, a (modern Moremi) socially transformed revolutionary advocate who now embodies sympathetic dispositions towards the masses. She chooses collective struggle over individual heroism. The playwright's Marxist idiosyncrasy reflects in the narrative, with the adoption of Yoruba oral tradition to create political satire that critique neocolonial tendencies towards the peasants and advocacy for their empowerment. This creative endeavour provokes audience engagement, imagination and participation through music, dance, and ritual elements that symbolise resistance. Osofisan's fusion of myth and history also creates a paradoxical situation that encourages people to interpret internal and external realities for social change.

### **Applied Theatre Aesthetics**

The nature of applied theatre is that it "addresses a wide audience and often focuses on many social and cultural phenomena, it is the most engaging compared to other forms of performing arts" (Ristić 4). In this regard, Nyikyaa describes applied theatre as "the use of dynamic, conventional and unconventional theatre approaches to propel conscientisation, dialogue, education and social change amongst the people" (401). It is the tendency to engage the people to help them view socio-cultural, political and economic issues affecting them from informed perspectives using theatre to advocate and legislate on such issues that inform the concept of applied theatre. This explains why it largely embodies nonconventional approaches such as social commentary, and social discourse to enforce the people's participation in the process. In other words, the use of theatre beyond the confines of traditional performances on designated conventional stage for targeted education and social mobilisation of the people attests to applied theatre aesthetics in this regard.

Therefore, applied theatre aesthetics connotes the beauty and form in performances designed for educational, social and/or political purposes, usually produced in non-traditional settings. This underscores the principle of aesthetics as a pertinent force that propels change through community dialogue, participation and integration in ritual and traditional embodiment of the people. In this regard, applied theatre is as aesthetic as it is cogent in addressing the avalanche of societal issues affecting the people. According to Gbilekaa, Akoh and Chukwu-Okoronkwo:

Applied theatre emerges as an invaluable tool for development communication, capable of bridging gaps in awareness, participation, and policy implementation. It offers not just a means of artistic expression but a strategic method for fostering dialogue, inspiring action, and promoting sustainable development across Nigeria's diverse settlements, from rural communities to sprawling urban cities (11).

Against this backdrop, the use of applied theatre transcends artistic expression, replete with entertainment and is applicable to specific areas of development. It is by practice an interventionist theatre that invariably informs new aesthetics and open vistas for new frontiers in theatre practice.

In African theatre for instance, the play serves as an aesthetic discourse where symbolic codes of communication are juxtaposed with verbal constructs to convey meaning.

Given that applied theatre is produced outside conventional venues, it is not only the fusion of artistic expressions and pragmatic world issues but also a strategy geared towards reaching the vulnerable groups for positive social change. It explores the aesthetic, political, and ethical aspects in the use of theatre to address grievances and foster transformation. The selected plays embody applied theatre aesthetics using cultural myths to address cogent issues, blending beauty with efficacy to conscientise and mobilise the people. In *Swem Karagbe*, the trip to “Swem” land amidst the “world” of spirits create cultural aesthetics that critique leadership and corruption in line with applied theatre's principles. In *Morountodun*, the ritualistic blend of mythic legend with history promotes dialogue on class struggle, spotlighting aesthetics as tool for conscientisation and ethical change.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts Sam Ukala's Theory of *Folkism* to underpin analysis of the folkloric framework that constitutes aesthetics in the selected texts, in terms of narrativity and creativity. *Folkism* emphasises the need for distinction between one literary drama and another depending on how much it has deployed African conventions of theatrical composition and performance. That is the extent to which plays are conformed to African performance aesthetics or are regarded as western prototypes (Ukala 285). According to Anigala, *folkism* is a “dramatic concept derived from the African folktale narrative technique. It is a strategy of using traditional folktale aesthetics in creating a dramatic work that is reflective of the African way of life”. This theory prescribes the inculcation of African oral traditions into a written play to propel the communicative power and participation of the people as usually practiced in African village squares. Asigbo affirms in this light that “Indeed, there's a marked difference in ideo-aesthetics in the folk plays of Sam Ukala which style he theorises as *Folkism*. *Folkism* or the folk play is an adept use of story-telling idioms to interrogate and tackle folk problems” (24).

The framework is hinged on eight principles, which Ukala conceptualised as The Laws of Aesthetic Response (33). That is *The Law of Opening* (style and convention: opening glee), *The Law of Joint Performance* (co-performing with the audience), *The Law of Creativity, free Enactment and Responsibility* (adopting new experiences for contemporary relevance), *The Law of Urge to Judge* (responses/appropriate feedback amidst performance), *The Law of Protest against Suspense* (comments to defuse the suspense), *The Law of Expression of the Emotions* (expression of grief, pleasure, scorn, fear and sympathy at appropriate timings), *The Law of Ego Projection* (exhibiting idiosyncrasies of interjecting occasionally), *The Law of Closing* (valedictory statement of morals/ closing formula).

### **The Aesthetics of Communication in the Plays**

Aesthetics by its nature is usually projected to perform specific functions in the works of art. Aesthetics could therefore “be defined as the philosophical study of beauty and taste. It comprises of what is good and bad in any work of art. It deals with nature and value of arts as well as those responses to natural objects that finds expression in the language of the beauty and ugly” (Amba 50). In this light:

African Aesthetic refers to the African perception and appreciation of the nature, beauty, and value of artistic expressions or representations of African origin. It is embedded in the plurality of African cultures and embodied in people's practices within their lived African societal contexts. It draws from and is directly related to the diverse geographical, environmental, historical, cultural, religious, or spiritual experiences of African peoples. It is therefore a significant component of African people's tangible and intangible cultural heritage that simultaneously affirms their diversity and reenforces their cultural unity (Amba 50).

The aesthetics of communication in African theatre is rooted in epic cultures of the people: storytelling, myths, legends, rituals, chants and proverbs. A typical African play is a hybrid of these folkloric elements as materials harnessed for dramatisation. While popular epics may form subject matters of many African plays, other folkloric elements such as music, dance, songs, chants, proverbs and so on form an ensemble in the dramatic script to find a blend and purposeful expression.

In *Swem Karagbe*, Hagherdeploys the typical African storytelling idiom punctuated by the elements of songs, music, dances, and mime as aesthetic endeavour to communicate leadership ideals, thereby creating participation that bridges the gap between performers and the audience. The stage direction in the play is a testament to this fact:

It's twilight. The head of the family sits on an easy chair, smoking. He has just finished the evening meal. His son comes out of the house and with a horn and blows shrill notes. There is immediate response as several young men and women come together round the old man, the narrator. The African story telling performance is the setting (Hagher 496).

The playwright's description here typifies an African storytelling scene where there is affinity between the storyteller and the audience thereby facilitating narrativity and creativity in this regard. The narrator now performs the usual call-and-response opening glee to set the narrative in motion:

|                  |                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Narrator:</b> | Do you know why it is never the oldest or richest or handsomest, tallest or themost educated men that are leaders of our country?              |
| <b>Audience:</b> | No!                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Narrator:</b> | Okay, give me your undivided attention. Once upon a time, several hundreds of years ago, there lived a chief of the Awuna people (Hagher 496). |

The disposition of the narrator in this play reveals the playwright's ingenuity culminating in narrativity and creativity. The aesthetic use of the phenomena resonates with the audience, and propels impartation, participation and most significantly the communication of national issues. The rapport of the narrator with the audience is significant in several ways. The audience represent

the people to whom the theatrical message is targeted. Moreover, their participation in the dramatisation process facilitates aesthetic endeavour typifying African performance conventions.

The playwright's creativity in the narration for instance is exemplified in aesthetics of allegory and role-play. The characters in the play (would-be politicians and their guide) that travel to "Swem" Land in search of fortunes as a prerequisite for leadership are allegorical; they connote the good, bad and the ugly in the society. For example, Yatsen (in Tiv literally translates as eat alone, which connotes greed), Gbabo (translates as ill luck, which connotes failure), Fuusu (translates as gluttony, which connotes greed/impatience) and Ankpan (literally translates as slave, which connotes servant/guide). He (Ankpan) is the only one that survives to return and is crowned the governor of his community. The narrator on another level, is characteristically dexterous and dynamic to switch from character to character through the technique of role-play

- Narrator:** Atlast, they arrive on the peak of Swem Karagbe. Everywhere was pitch darkness on the mountain. But their eyes were opened, and they saw a beautiful city of solid gold, and their god addressed them.
- Narrator (asgod):** My sons, welcome to the land of your great ancestors. I am very happy indeed that your chief has, at last, hit the best way of leadership. I will today grant you anything you asked for yourselves, and for your tribe. Remember, for any good thing asked, you must also ask for a bad one.
- Yatwen:** *(steps forward)* Aondo, God hear me. I want to own all the biggest shops in the land.
- Narrator:** For your people?
- Yatwen:** Let there be famine. I want to have in my bed the most beautiful women of the land.
- Gbabo:** *(takes his place)* I want to be the governor and also the chairman of all the boards and corporations in the land.
- Narrator:** For the people?
- Gbabo:** Let development escape them. I want my name to be seen every morning in the pages of newspapers, and heard on radio, and my face on deletion every hour.
- Ankpan:** *(in kneeling position)* I ask that I may continue to be the eye of the people; to serve with courage, humility and patience.
- Narrator:** And the land?
- Ankpan:** Let the people multiply and be healthy. Let prosperity reign and poverty and ignorance be banished in the land (Hagher 511-512).

The narrator is in this instance role-playing the god at "Swem Karagbe", who plays host to the three would-be politicians and their slave guide who are pledging their intentions. This narrative underscores African aesthetic endeavours using narrativity and creativity in the play. The moral gamut of the narrative is echoed at the end, through the narrator's closing glee, emphasising the imperative of African storytelling theatre transcending mere entertainment.

**Narrator:** And so it is my children, that self-appointed leaders of the people, as the story has unfolded, always have undisclosed motives for wanting to rule us...The lesson learnt by the Awuna people should be a lesson for all of us (Hagher 527).

The deployment of narration in this play typifies the African storytelling idiom with a beginning-ending structure which Ukala theorised as “Laws of Aesthetic response”, especially the laws of opening and closing (285).

In *Morountodun*, Osofisan's aesthetics of communication involve dialogic narration and role-play to communicate class consciousness, with Titubi, the protagonist whose journey symbolises collective resistance. The narrativity and creativity is exemplified in an ingenious narrator who is a theatre director relating with the audience about the play they have come to watch. This fosters empathy and action, aligning with applied theatre methods to conscientise people. The narrative in this regard embodies the folkloric elements of songs, music, dance and chants that are embedded in Yoruba oral tradition. The coalescence of Moremi myth and historical Agbekoya crisis underscores the deployment of myth and ritual as aesthetics of communication.

**Director:** Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. We will soon be starting. But while the actors prepare, I'll try and give you a rapid summary of our play tonight. The play, as you will soon see, starts in the year 1969, the month of September. That year, if you remember, the civil war was raging in the east of the country, but this play has nothing to do with that. It deals with another war, the one that was later to be popularly known as Agbekoya Uprising...We decided to do a play about it and take it round to all open places (Osofisan 5-6).

The fluidity of this narration opens new vistas; the audience gets insight into the story, and rapport is established with them as well as disabuses their minds of the historical accuracy of the dramatised event they have come to watch. The crux of narration in this regard tilts to the socio-historic commentary of war being conveyed to the audience as theatre of conscientisation rather than attempt to charm their emotions into believing the dramatised story itself. This speaks to the pedagogic nature of African theatre usually deployed as instrument of social orientation and education. It is also an aesthetic endeavour which serves as applied theatre of communication in this play.

Moreover, the playwright's creative ingenuity is equally accentuated through the coalescence of subject matter and characterisation to communicate leadership and patriotism. For instance, Moremi's myth (centres on the legend of Ile-Ife) is ingeniously coalesced with the Agbekoya uprising (the historical Peasants' Revolt) as monolithic subject in the narrative. At the same time, the protagonist, Titubi is cast as the modern Moremi drawing similarities and parallels in their personalities.

**Titubi:** *(Titubi walks slowly round the cell).* They are already outside, he said. They'll soon be here! I...I am afraid, suddenly... *(Pause)* No! Moremi was not afraid! *(Snaps her fingers backwards over her head).* Fear go away! Doubt and trembling, retreat from me!... *(She retrieves the Moremi necklace from the flour and looks at it)* She was a woman, like me. And she waited all alone, for the Igbo warriors. All her people went into hiding, but she alone stood and waited. I can feel her heart beating, like mine...But how lucky you were, Moremi! How I envy you! Look, I have only the dampness of these walls around me, to wish me goodbye. But you, you had the scent of the market around you. The smell of fish, the dolence of spices, sweet decay of wood, smell of rain-washed thatches, the tang of mud at your feet...ah Moremi! What were your thoughts at the lonely moment? Can I read your mind...Maybe it will strengthen me...(Osofisan 30-31).

Creatively, the playwright deploys the Moremi myth to bear on the dramatic story by casting Titubi, the protagonist to bask in the euphoria of Moremi's heroism. This psychological emblematisation of the age long legend inspires the protagonist but also makes her reflect soberly on the circumstances and personalities as the plot advances. The two characters in the end are symbolically placed side by side for comparative purposes:

*(The song cuts off in a general freeze. Lights come on in the auditorium. Onstage, on opposing platforms, MOREMI and TITUBI are caught in hash spotlights, looking at each other)* (Osofisan 79).

This interaction is creatively significant because Titubi represents the transformed version of the age long Moremi. This is an indication that the playwright has not only harnessed the Moremi story as a historical phenomenon, but as a myth that embodies cultural, traditional, and spiritual significance in the play.

**Titubi:** I am not Moremi! Moremi served the State, was the State, was the spirit of the ruling class. But it is not true that the State is always right... (Osofisan 70).

This is indicative that Titubi now disassociates self from the ruling class she initially sets out to defend and uphold. Her confession stems from the transformations she undergoes in the peasants' camp. And it draws a parallel between Moremi of Ile-Ife and Titubi, the modern Moremi. She now identifies with the plight of the ordinary people against her elitist background.

The closing glee also comes in handy as one of the characteristics of narration in African drama in general and Nigerian drama in particular. The narrator at the end of the play pedagogically projects the moral imperative of the story to the audience. He asserts succinctly that:

**Director:** I suppose you'd like to know how the story ended? In the end, peace came, but from the negotiating table, after each side had burned itself out. Yes, that's history for you...But still, you must

not imagine that what we presented here tonight was the truth. This is a theatre, don't forget, a house of dream and phantom struggles. The *real* struggle, the real truth, is out there, among you, on the street, in your homes; in your daily living and dying... (Osofisan 78-79).

The stylistic opening and closing glees of narration underscores the aesthetics of purposeful communication in this play. The use of the myth of Moremi, which is a pertinent aspect of the people's culture and tradition, facilitate this aesthetics of communication. Moreover, the audience should serve as judges, who must not empathise but critically evaluate history, or folk tradition as dramatised to deduce truth and meaning in them. This is in tandem with Ukala's Laws of Aesthetic Response, especially the laws of Joint Performance with the audience, Creativity, Free Enactment and Responsibility as well as Urge to Judge the theatrical output by members of the audience.

### Conclusion

Hagher's *Swem Karagbe* and Osofisan's *Morountodun* demonstrate how narrativity and creativity connote applied theatre aesthetics to facilitate profound communication of pertinent societal issues. The deployment of the people's folklore in terms of myths, legends and rituals to re-invent concrete narratives for contemporary relevance is a creative ingenuity. Moreover, Hagher's *Swem Karagbe* evidently harnesses Tiv mythology to accentuate cultural identity where aspiring leaders confront moral and societal challenges thereby exposing individual weaknesses, greed and sense of purpose. This phenomenon communicates leadership challenges as a national question.

Similarly, Osofisan's *Morountodun* reinterprets the Yoruba myth of Moremi within the historical context of peasant uprising, emphasising self-sacrifice and class struggle to critique social inequalities and the need for national consciousness. Both plays exemplify applied theatre's potential to engage audiences in transformative dialogues, using narrativity and creativity as aesthetic tools for communication. The deployment of narrators who exhibit dexterity of narration translating in role-plays, flashbacks, social advocacy and quite pertinently rapport with members of the audience is a testament in this regard. In other words, the plays highlight the necessity of self-sacrifice and collective action against oppression, using aesthetic frames to inspire transformation cultural transmission and emancipation.

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